

# COMMENTARY

by Paul Kozakiewicz

## **What an election!**

After weeks of counting, a winner in the District 1 race was declared, with Sandra Fewer beating back nine candidates for the honor of serving Richmond District and Laurel Heights residents at City Hall.

Congratulations to Fewer for winning, and also to the other candidates, who were all well-informed and passionate about important local issues.

## **Transportation takes hit on ballot, drags down homeless services**

One issue on the Nov. 8 ballot that didn't get any love was Proposition K, which was a three-quarter sales tax increase for transportation and homeless services. It would have raised about \$150 million a year, with \$100 million going to transportation and \$50 million to help provide homeless services.

The SF Board of Supervisors voted to put Prop. K on the ballot, saying the regressive tax should only need a majority vote for approval so the money could be put in the city's General Fund, instead of the usual two-thirds vote needed to increase taxes.

The voters liked a companion measure spelling out how the taxes should be used for the homeless portion of Prop. K, so they supported the homeless component of the proposition.

But the fatal flaw was linking it with transportation, and the abysmal records of the SF County Transportation Authority (CTA), which is comprised of the members of the SF Board of Supervisors, and the SF Municipal Transportation Agency (MTA or Muni), which is comprised of appointees of the mayor, who are approved by the supervisors.

City voters crushed Prop. K, with about two-thirds of the voters saying "no" to giving more money to a rogue city agency hell-bent on destroying the character of the city's neighborhoods in the name of transportation progress.

The problem was compounded when SF Mayor Ed Lee made the amateur mistake of assuming the tax measure would pass, and included it in his city budget.

When the measure lost, he went to the transportation agencies and got assurances that

they could replace the \$100 million earmarked for them by delaying projects, etc., but the \$50 million earmarked for homeless services was a problem that required some cuts and reconfiguring.

When I asked the mayor if he would include revenue from proposed tax measures in his future budgets, he said, “probably not.”

## **MTA on a roll lately**

The SF Municipal Transportation Agency has been on a roll lately, making enemies on Geary Boulevard, Taraval Street, Van Ness Avenue, O’Farrell Street, Mission Street, Polk Street and streets in other neighborhoods in the City because it ignores or patronizes legitimate neighborhood concerns. It rolls into a neighborhood, like the Outer Sunset, and says, ‘This is what we’re going to do. What concerns do you have so we can try to mitigate them?’ instead of getting feedback from local residents and merchants so planners are informed about concerns before a grand-redevelopment scheme is formulated in secrecy behind closed doors.

It has become apparent to many city residents that the MTA needs to be reformed, and brought under the direct auspices of the mayor or board of supervisors.

Then, we can affect change when directors are unresponsive to the public, rather than facing unknown people who face little or no consequences for their actions.

The way the MTA is set up now, the agency is responsible to no one.

I could go on all day about the abuses perpetrated by the MTA, but here are a couple local ones:

- MTA planners barreled into the Outer Sunset and told merchants and residents that boarding locations for the Taraval streetcar would be eliminated and/or moved; two of Taraval’s four lanes would be changed to “buses only;” parking spaces would be eliminated and/or moved to residential streets (diagonal parking); boarding islands for streetcars would be constructed in the middle of Taraval Street; and merchants would have to fight to keep their businesses open during construction. They then asked for feedback from the people who live and work there!
- Richmond District organizations have been fighting the MTA’s plan to take two lanes of traffic on Geary Boulevard and to dedicate them for city buses only. The plan is fraught with negative consequences for the neighborhood, including pushing large amounts of traffic onto ancillary roads and subjecting the neighborhood and local merchants to years of construction. The MTA’s effort to speed up transit is one of the things it is supposed to do, but 80 percent of the time savings planned for Geary will come from pedestrian bulb-outs, removing stops and giving buses traffic signal priority. All of those things are currently being implemented. Instead of waiting to evaluate the results of those changes, the MTA wants to spend \$300 million or more to disrupt the

